

INDIGENOUS ART ON GRANVILLE ISLAND

CRAFT COUNCIL OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

AINSLEE BEER - POLICY MANAGER

JANUARY - MARCH 2021

An audit + policy project to ensure that Indigenous-themed products being sold on Granville Island are authentically made or designed by Indigenous artists



OVERVIEW

WHAT IS THE PROJECT?

The CCBC's audit is looking at all Indigenous-themed products sold on Granville Island, and how many are authentically made and produced by Indigenous artists. Our findings are in this report, along with recommendations to Granville Island on how to improve Indigenous representation and how to reduce the sale of fake Indigenous-themed items.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

The Craft Council of British Columbia is a charitable arts service organization which supports all stages of artistic practice in the craft sector. Our office and shop are located on Granville Island, which is part of the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples—Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations. In preparation for this project, we have consulted and received guidance from Indigenous artists and community leaders, journalists and scholars from across the country.

Granville Island is managed by the Federal Government through the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), which approved this project. Any implementation of the final policy recommendations will be up to CMHC.



OVERVIEW

WHY ARE WE DOING IT?

The goal of this project is to promote authentic Indigenous art, support Indigenous artists, and stop the sale of fake, appropriated or reproduced Indigenous symbols. The sale of fake or reproduced Indigenous art is a hugely common problem in Vancouver, especially in tourist spots like Granville Island, taking income and agency away from Indigenous artists.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Indigenous control over cultural symbols is vital to the protection of Indigenous identity and an important step in reconciliation, and is stated as a right in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We hope that the findings of this project will eventually inform a city and province-wide policy on the sale of Indigenous art.

Authentic Indigenous representation in the marketplace impacts the following:

- **Creative Agency & Intellectual Property:** Fake items distract customers from real art; fake items are disrespectful to the history and legacy of indigenous art forms which are passed on through generations and have significant, sacred meaning
- **Economic Impact:** the sale of fake items directly takes economic opportunities away from Indigenous artists, which in turn takes away economic development/sustainability from Indigenous communities



RESULTS

- 81 Shops, galleries or studios
- 18 carried Indigenous-themed products
- Only 4 carried entirely authentic products
- Only 1 shop is Indigenous Owned
- No permanent studios are dedicated to Indigenous artists

For more details or any questions about this report, please reach out to ainsleeabeer@gmail.com or our Executive Director at rainejmckay@craftcouncilbc.ca

INDIGENOUS ART ON GRANVILLE ISLAND



81

Eighty-one stores, galleries and studios were visited on Granville Island between January and March 2021



18

Of those, eighteen carried Indigenous-themed products or work by Indigenous artists



22%

Only 4 out of 18 shops, galleries and studios carried entirely authentic Indigenous products



39%

7 out of 18 carried a mix of both authentic and inauthentic products



39%

The remaining 7 out of 18 carried only inauthentic products, or the authenticity of the work could not be verified



Only 1 out of 81 shops, galleries and studios visited was Indigenous-owned

0%

None of the permanent studios or artist spaces are occupied by Indigenous makers

4



RESULTS

Our Policy Manager Ainslee Beer visited **81 shops, galleries and art studios on Granville Island** between January and March 2021. Of the 81 shops, galleries or studios, 18 had products or items that were Indigenous themed or created by Indigenous artists. Of those 18, **4 had entirely authentic Indigenous products, 7 had both authentic and inauthentic products, and 7 either carried only inauthentic products**, or the authenticity of the items could not be confirmed.

Out of the 81 businesses and studios, **only 1 is Indigenous owned** and **none of the permanent artist studio spaces or galleries are occupied by Indigenous Artists.**



OBSERVATIONS

- For businesses that did carry authentic products, many carried products from the same companies.
- Many business managers or owners expressed positive feedback on this project.
- Many business managers or owners also explained that they intentionally do not stock any Indigenous-themed products in order to direct customers to the businesses that do.
- One business owner referenced "artistic freedom" regarding their non-authentic products.
- Several business owners who carried some authentic products spoke highly of the artists they had built relationships with.
- Three business owners/managers commented that they had already been approached about the authenticity of their products by a journalist a few years ago. One of these businesses removed all non-authentic products as a result of that media coverage.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, we recommend that CMHC start with the following:

- Improve the Indigenous information on the Granville Island website. For example, fix the inconsistent language; it currently uses the terms "Native," "First Nations," "Aboriginal" and "Indigenous" interchangeably which is disrespectful and misleading.
- Create or set aside permanent, affordable studio space for Indigenous artists to make their work in.
- For the businesses which currently sell a mix of authentic and inauthentic products, suggest or require that they switch to selling only authentic items. For businesses which only sell inauthentic products, suggest or require that they remove the items and replace them with products from recognized Indigenous companies or artists.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Many business owners expressed that they carry inauthentic items (magnets, keychains, etc.) because they are inexpensive and appealing to tourists. We recommend that CMHC addresses this topic with a conversation with the community
 - Discuss how these products are misleading and misrepresent Indigenous culture. **Selling entirely authentic items will give the Island an opportunity to showcase the talent of local Indigenous artists.**
 - There are a number of Indigenous companies that currently make products at a wide range of price points. Encourage business owners to build relationships with these makers.

These recommendations are just a start to promoting Indigenous art on Granville Island and in BC. It is important to note that it is not up to CCBC, CMHC, or any one business to define what "Authentic" Indigenous art means. Any work on this front should be lead by Indigenous artists and leaders themselves, with policymakers following their lead.



RECOMMENDATIONS

We hope that this report will contribute to the important work already being done in this field, and that Granville Island will transition to a space that celebrates authentic Indigenous art.

For more information on resources, who we worked with and how we defined authenticity, see our website at:

<https://craftcouncilbc.ca/indigenous-art-on-granville-island/>

For details about the audit findings, feedback on the recommendations or any other questions, please contact our Executive Director at:

rainejmckay@craftcouncilbc.ca

Footer photo: Annie Ross

